



July 25, 2007

Washington State Congressional Delegation
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Sent via facsimile and email

Dear Representative:

This week the House will consider H.R. 2419, the Farm Bill Extension Act of 2007.

On behalf of Washington Farm Bureau and its nearly 35,000 member families, I am writing to urge you to support H.R. 2419 as approved by the Committee on Agriculture and oppose the Kind (D-Wis.) amendment.

H.R. 2419 is balanced and forward-looking legislation that will benefit Washington's farm and ranch families. The following provisions are of particular importance to our state.

- A new "Horticulture and Organic Agriculture" title, which provides **\$1.6 billion in funding to specialty crop producers** in areas critical to their operations, including research, conservation, pest and disease programs and nutrition.
 - Mandatory funding that would support expansion of the **specialty crop block grant** program is included.
 - U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) **purchases of fruits, vegetables, and nuts** is expanded by about \$200 million per year.
 - Fruit and vegetable producers are given a new tool for cooperating in efforts to **fight food-borne illness**. USDA is authorized to approve producers' requests to include in marketing orders good handling practices and other methods for ensuring the safety and wholesomeness of specialty crops.
 - Funding and planning is offered for new joint Federal/State programs to provide **early detection and surveillance of plant pests and diseases**. The funding levels increase from \$10 million in FY 2008 to \$100 million in FY 2012.
- The bill provides reforms that give farmers the opportunity to use a **counter-cyclical revenue (CCR) program** instead of the traditional counter-cyclical payments. A CCR program will ensure that growers get help when they need it the most. A well-designed CCR program can deliver protection against not just low prices, but also low yields. It can,

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therefore, ensure better protection against volatile commodity prices and significant crop losses.

- By better balancing support programs between all types of crops, the bill's reforms further **encourage farmers to plant for the market, not for the benefit of government programs.**
- Additional reforms in this farm bill decrease adjusted gross income levels for eligibility by at least 20 percent. These reforms will help ensure that only those who are farmers – in a way that Americans traditionally think of farmers – are benefiting from farm payments.
- This bill includes reforms important to **addressing the special needs and concerns of young, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.** For example, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers are eligible for additional cost share funding for conservation investments made on their land under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). One of the biggest challenges facing these same farmers is obtaining credit. The bill addresses this challenge by including reforms that adjust farm ownership loan rates and caps to give these producers a better chance of getting their operation off the ground.
- The **Conservation and Energy titles are strengthened** in ways that will specifically benefit Washington producers.
 - **EQIP funding increases** by \$2 billion by 2012 and promotion of forest management and energy conservation is included in that program. EQIP is also expanded to allow incentive payments for technical services that will help fruit and vegetable producers access the program. The bill also changes the evaluation process for EQIP applications to give priority to State, regional or local resource concerns.
 - Up to \$2 billion in **loan guarantee authority** is provided **for bio-refineries**, with half going to loans of less than \$100 million, and the other half for loans up to \$250 million.
 - It provides \$1.5 billion to continue the Bio-energy Program, which provides production incentives for increases in production of ethanol and bio-diesel made from agricultural and forestry crops and associated waste materials, including animal manure and livestock/food processing waste.
 - A Biomass Energy Reserve Program is created to develop the next generation of feed stocks for renewable energy, if costs can be offset.
 - A **Forest Bio-energy Research Program** is established and receives \$75 million to address issues facing the use of woody biomass for bio-energy production, including feedstock issues such as yield and new varieties.
 - The Secretary is required to conduct an inventory of biomass resources on a county by county basis.
- The bill also addresses important **trade issues.** Of particular note for Washington exporters:
 - **Market Access Program funding increases** by \$125 million over 5 years.
 - The Foreign Market Development Program, which works to expand U.S. export opportunities, is extended.

- The **Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program**, which helps U.S. organizations address sanitary, phytosanitary and technical barriers that keep them from exporting to certain other countries, is increased.
- Export Credit Guarantee Programs are modified to bring them into **compliance with World Trade Organization agreements**.
- McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program is reauthorized. If costs can be offset, the 2007 Farm Bill will increase funding for the McGovern-Dole program.
- The ability of the Agency for International Development to pre-position food around the world – to **get food aid to people faster** – is enhanced.
- **Oversight and monitoring** of food aid programs, to increase efficiency and ensure effectiveness, **is improved**.

Importantly, **H.R. 2419 represents real reform** because for the first time in recent history, no additional funding is provided for commodity programs. **Increased funding and emphasis is instead placed on nutrition, conservation, energy and rural development.**

For these reasons, Washington Farm Bureau asks that you vote for H.R. 2419, the Farm Bill Extension Act of 2007 – without the Kind amendment.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Connor
National Affairs Director

cc: U.S. House delegation Agriculture Legislative Assistants (via email)